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EXPOSITORY AND PRACTICAL STUDIES ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST

XXIII. JESUS AND THE CHILDREN

MATT. 18:1-14¹

I. CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Of these the most important is whether the words, "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost," constituting the eleventh verse in the Authorized Version, should be retained or not. The weight of evidence is for their rejection, the deciding factor being that these words are not found here in the oldest and most trustworthy group of manuscripts. Nothing of gospel truth, however, nor even of its tender expression, is lost by dropping this interpolation, or, more accurately, quotation; for we find this statement in Luke 19:10.

II. EXPOSITION

"In that hour:" By this phrase the evangelist suggests the relation of this event to that narrated in 17:24-27. In that Jesus had given up a right in order that he might not cause prejudiced and ignorant men to stumble, and "in that hour," when he was regarding the interests of others above his own, and had set that example to the disciples, they came to him with a question prompted by selfish ambition. Our familiarity with the scene doubtless prevents us from seeing how striking an answer the object-lesson Jesus gave them really was. If, today, to a group of eager politicians just before election a child should be pointed out as a model of political action, we should see what that company of disciples experienced. To their inquiry who should be the *greatest* in the kingdom, Jesus replies that except they turn, and become as little children (cf. John 3:3), they could not so much as enter the kingdom. The policy of a lifetime, the spirit of self-seeking, was to be abandoned, and a childlike spirit of simplicity to be cultivated. To these words concerning the necessity of the childlike spirit, Jesus adds (vss. 5, 6) words teaching also the infinite value of children in the eyes of God, and his anger at those who wilfully or carelessly lead them into sin. The child-study circles, the leagues for the betterment of poor children, the orphan asylums, the industrial schools for city waifs, the outcry against child-labor, are the world's partial and tardy response to this part of the teaching we are considering. But it is easier to give to an orphan asylum

¹ International Sunday-School Lesson for July 1, 1906.

or a crèche than to exhibit a childlike humility, and today we need still to hear the words: "Verily I say unto you, except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." And would there not be fewer childless marriages, if the words, "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me," were thoughtfully considered and the spiritual authority behind them realized?

Verses 7-10 (following the thought of "causing to stumble" in vs. 6) contain teaching concerning responsibility for our influence over others who naturally look up to us, including also warning against being ourselves made to stumble. It would be difficult to imagine words more forcible, unless the specific utterance concerning Judas be so: ". . . woe unto that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had not been born." The beautiful, illustrative parable in vss. 12-14 is self-explanatory.

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMON

Theme: Conditions of membership and of greatness in the kingdom of heaven.

1. Childlike humility.

a) Is necessary to participation in the kingdom of heaven.

b) Exalts those who possess it to the highest place; in proportion as one possesses it is he great in the kingdom.

2. Regard for children. He whose own heart is simple and childlike recognizes the value of the children and looks at them as God does, recognizing—

a) That God cares for (vs. 14) and seeks after (vss. 12, 13) every one of them; and

b) That service done to them is service done to Christ. Food for the starving children of Japan, help for the helpless children of Africa, playgrounds for the children of America's crowded city streets, service and love for "nobody's children," are service done to Christ (Matt. 25:40, 45).

3. A sense of responsibility for our conduct not only in respect to children, but to all. This will lead us

a) To avoid all that would lead us into sin.

b) To avoid all that would be a stumbling-block to others

c) And lead to seek and to save those that have gone astray.

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XXIV. JESUS' ANSWER TO PETER'S QUESTION CONCERNING FORGIVENESS

MATT. 18:21-35²

I. CRITICAL QUESTIONS

The illustrative part of this selection is found only in Matthew, though earlier portions of the chapter, evidently belonging to the same discourse, appear in modified form in both Mark and Luke. The substance of vs. 22 is found in Luke 17:4, but not in answer to a question, as in Matthew.

II. EXPOSITION

1. Peter's question: *Master, how often am I to forgive my brother when he wrongs me—as many as seven times?*

The preceding verses of the chapter form the background of this question. A discussion concerning pre-eminence in the new kingdom having arisen, Jesus rebukes the spirit of self-seeking which had provoked it, by setting a little child in their midst. He proceeds to instruct his followers further concerning the nature of the life he desires them to live. In vs. 15 he urges upon his hearers the exercise of the spirit of forgiveness toward one another.

Peter, perhaps perplexed over what seemed to him to be a grave omission in the Master's exhortation, asks his question: What *rule* do you ask us to observe? The requirement laid down by the rabbis was that forgiveness should be granted three times; possibly this is insufficient. Let the standard be raised. Make it seven times. Is that what you mean by urging upon us the duty of forgiveness—that the standard should be raised to seven?

2. The answer: *Not merely seven times, but seventy times seven.* The reply was an epoch-making utterance. Forgiveness among you shall not be according to *rule*; the spirit of forgiveness must dominate your lives. As often as there is occasion for exercising forgiveness, you must forgive. Forgiveness is a matter of the heart, an attitude of life.

3. Jesus illustrates his meaning by a concrete example.

In approaching this parable care must be taken lest the purpose of the story be lost in the process of trying to extract a specific meaning from the separate details. No attempt should be made to draw close analogies: the king cannot represent God. The first attitude of the king toward his servant makes it impossible that Jesus should intend the king to represent the heavenly Father. The sums specified are used merely to contrast great indebtedness with a debt of exceedingly small importance. The selling of

² International Sunday-School Lesson for July 8, 1906.

wife and children for debt was common in all ancient countries.

When the king hears of his servant's ungenerous act, with indignation he revokes his former clemency. The exercise of the unforgiving spirit reacts upon the individual possessed by such a spirit.

4. Jesus applies the central thought of the parable to his hearers. *In the same way will my heavenly Father treat you, unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.*

Such, Peter, is my answer to your question. Forgiveness is an attitude of the heart; it is not an external matter to be regulated by rule.

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMON: FORGIVENESS

1. Its nature. An attitude of the heart. The spirit of a man's life. Cannot be regulated by rule.

2. The exercise of forgiveness. Voluntary. The king freely forgives; no one is required to pay the debt first in the place of the delinquent, in order to dispose the king to remit the debt.

3. Reaction of the unforgiving spirit upon its possessor. He who judges harshly shall receive the same treatment from others. And the converse is true. The man who treats his fellow-men generously invites a similar treatment upon himself.

4. How is this attitude of the heart to be obtained? A practical question. Christianity answers it: place your life daily in contact with that of the Christ. His spirit becomes contagious. Multitudes of ungenerous human spirits have been transformed by this irresistible contagion.

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XXV. THE GOOD SAMARITAN

LUKE 10:25-37³

I. CRITICAL QUESTIONS

The introduction (vss. 25-29) has been identified with the incident in Luke 18:18-23, Mark 10:17-22, and Matt. 19:16-22; but it differs from these passages in the answer made by Jesus. This introduction has also been identified with the incident in Matt. 22:35-40 and Mark 12:28-32; but it differs from these passages in the question put by the lawyer and in the fact that the lawyer, not Jesus, quotes the Old Testament section.

II. EXPOSITION

The locality in which this interview was held is not specified. However, the interview is an epitome of the method and the teaching of the scribes,

³ International Sunday-School Lesson for July 15, 1906.

in contrast with the method and the teaching of Jesus. The first question is pre-eminently Jewish. The questioner is a lawyer or, as he would be called in the other gospels, a scribe; that is, one who devoted himself to the law. The purpose to "tempt" or test Jesus manifests the Jewish method of presenting a difficult question to an authoritative teacher. The question itself means, "By what act can I get the life spoken of in Dan. 12:2, the life of the messianic kingdom?" The questions of Jesus in reply follow the method of the rabbis; they did not answer the questions put to them, but referred to the authority in all matters, the law; that is, the law of the Old Testament and the tradition that had gathered about it. The reply of the lawyer is an expression of the best thought of his day, and it is remarkable; for, combining two Old Testament passages (Deut. 6:9 and Lev. 19:18), it unites love of God and love of neighbor. The fourfold division, "heart, soul, mind, and strength" (vs. 30) means only "completely;" the Jews did not make the modern psychological distinctions. The last question, "Who is my neighbor?" is a good example of rabbinical hair-splitting. For although in the Old Testament neighbor meant a fellow-Hebrew, in the New Testament times it had one of three meanings: first, fellow-countryman; second, people dwelling in the land; third, those strictly observing the law. From the lawyer's point of view the question was apropos. But the reply of Jesus annihilates casuistical narrowness and quibbling in reference to duty to fellow-man.

The parable was intended primarily for the lawyer. It makes one point through the use of the dramatic element, the unexpected. A man traveling along the Jericho road, which was infested with bandits, was robbed, beaten, left half dead. Now, because human instinct has always overridden and always will override social and national distinctions to help a man left half dead by robbers, we should expect the first man who came along to do something for this unfortunate fellow. Contrary to all human expectations, a priest, then afterward a Levite, came, saw the man, and passed by on the opposite side. Contrary to all Jewish expectations, a Samaritan, a religious outcast, came, saw the man, had compassion on him, and helped him at the cost of money and trouble.

In applying the parable, Jesus, reversing the Jewish method, appealed not to authority, but to a man's sense (vs. 36). Breaking down all limitations, he made the subject rather than the object the criterion (vs. 37). He changed the question from one of theory to one of practice.

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMON: NEIGHBORLINESS

1. Jesus made real the ideal of Moses and the prophets: the union of religion and morality (Matt. 22:38). This union he brought about by

founding his morality on neighborliness (Matt. 5:48; cf. 1 John 4:20); for what a man is to men that he is to God.

2. Neighborliness is holding toward all men the beneficent attitude which God holds toward all men (Matt. 5:43). It is not a rule, but a principle. A rule is limited in its application, but a principle is universal. The Jews, governed by rules, could cease their activity on the sabbath; Jesus, guided by principle, could never cease his beneficent activity. The Pharisees, having done their prescribed duties, considered their work done and their reward due; Jesus taught that, no matter how much a man did, his work was not done, and least of all did he merit a reward (Luke 17:7-10). Neighborliness, the principle of man's relation to man, implies a service limited in length and breadth only by the needs of men. Paul illustrated this principle when he said he was debtor to the whole world, and to all classes in the world, because he had a gospel which the world needed (Rom. 1:14).

3. The practice of this principle varies in form. When the crowd that followed Jesus needed bread, he gave them bread; when they needed instruction, he gave them instruction. The demand for practice is constant. The highest good in the kingdom is social as well as individual; no taste, no tie of duty, can excuse a man from the practice of neighborliness. According to the Master, there is a worse monastery than a monastery built of stone; it is a monastery built of tastes and prejudices.

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XXVI. JESUS TEACHING HOW TO PRAY

LUKE: 11:1-13⁴

I. CRITICAL QUESTIONS

The other passage where the Lord's Prayer is recorded is in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:9-13). A comparison of the two passages reveals the fact that three clauses which appear in Matthew are not in Luke. The third petition, "Thy will be done," and the seventh, "Deliver us from evil," also the words, "which art in heaven," are omitted in Luke, and Origen says they were omitted in his day.

There are minor differences in the words used and shades of meaning; e. g., Luke has, "Continually give us day by day our bread for the coming day," while Matthew has, "Give us this day our bread for the coming day."

⁴ International Sunday-School Lesson for July 22, 1906.

Luke has "sins," while Matthew has "debts." Luke has, "For we ourselves also forgive everyone that is indebted to us;" Matthew, "As we also have forgiven our debtors." An old manuscript has, "Remit to us, and we will also remit," which is thought by some authorities to be the original. Matthew adds the reason for our forgiving our debtors, viz., that God's forgiveness cannot be appropriated by us if our hearts are not themselves in a condition to forgive; i. e., the same condition of heart is demanded for receiving or for granting forgiveness, viz., a forgiving attitude.

The Friend at Midnight parable has no parallel, but a similar teaching is found in Luke 18:1-8, in the instance of the unjust judge granting the widow's request solely because of her importunity.

Of Luke 11:9-13 the entire material is given almost verbatim in Matt. 7:7-11, with the exception of vs. 12.

As to the time when the lesson on prayer was given to the disciples, we cannot learn, inasmuch as Matthew and Luke do not agree. It might be easily supposed that at all events it was earlier than the Perean ministry, when we consider how large a factor prayer was in the Master's life.

II. EXPOSITION

The passage has three distinct parts, the first being the direct lesson on how to pray, vss. 1-4; the second, a parable giving the assurance that God will answer prayer, vss. 5-8; and the third, an exhortation on prayer. It should be noted that Luke is pre-eminently the gospel of prayer. Of nine recorded instances before this time (assuming the time in the Perean ministry) only four are mentioned by either Mark or Matthew. Study the transfiguration (Luke 9:28), Peter's confession (Luke 9:18), choosing the twelve (Luke 6:12, also 5:16; 3:21). The prayer-life of the Master, as seen through Luke's gospel, is much more marked than in the other evangelists. We wish we knew what kind of praying John had taught his disciples. We can only guess that it differed from Jesus' praying as John's preaching differed from Jesus', for we *know* nothing about it. The question cannot but arise in this connection as to whether the form of this prayer is a model, or whether it is the spirit alone that concerns us. It was a new prayer for a Jew. There is no pleading for Israel. God was addressed as Father, not as the Lord God of Israel. As prayer is the key to every man's thoughts and life, so this great prayer becomes. It is for every man to utter, little as the disciples thought of such a prayer when their request was made.

The parable teaches us that there is no time when prayer is unseasonable, if a need exists; and that if unseasonable requests persisted in will bring answers from our friends, how much more likely is God to give us good

gifts. Immediately Jesus goes on to add the force of his own direct exhortation, that the example and the parable be not lost, saying, "And I say unto you," laying emphasis on the "I." If the suppliant in the parable fared so well, the disciples may know how they will fare; so they are to continue asking, seeking, knocking, in a climax of increasing earnestness.

III. SUGGESTION FOR SERMON

Theme: The Christian prayer.

Thesis: The Christian's prayer is a power that secures the best gift of God, viz., the Holy Spirit.

1. What is the Christian's prayer? The Christian's attitude in prayer must be indicated by the word "Father." The feeling of our sonship, the sense of his fatherhood, with all the consequent loyalty to him in life and purpose, are implied. The spirit of reverence, "Hallowed be thy name," is vital to the real prayer. So also is the sense of need of forgiveness and the desire for it. And then the childlikeness that will ask for the great physical necessities, and for protection from the evil of the world, must be included.

2. What assurance have we that God answers even this sort of prayer? Men grant each other's requests even when the higher sentiments make no appeal. The mere asking from men gets things. Then, when the inertia of withholding is overcome, men even give liberally. (Note that it was the getting up that was so hard. When up once, he gave him as many loaves as he desired.) God is much better than men, and how certain we can be that he will do better!

3. Christ's direct and explicit command is that we pray earnestly, and his promise is that we shall receive. God is more willing to give us the very best gift, viz., his Holy Spirit, than evil parents are to give gifts to their own.

Prayer has assigned to it a large place in the kingdom; it had a large place in Jesus' life. Our power will be in exact ratio to the place prayer has in our lives.

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XXVII. DISCOURSE AT A CHIEF PHARISEE'S TABLE

LUKE 14:1-14⁵

I. EXPOSITION

Toward the close of the Perea ministry, as the opposition of the Pharisees became more open and bitter, Jesus continued to meet their challenges boldly (Luke 11:37-54). He apparently did not care to go out of his

⁵ International Sunday-School Lesson for July 29, 1906.

way to avoid the attacks which came more and more frequently. Even when again invited to dine with a leader of the opposition, and thus to expose himself for hours to the cunning cross-examination of the company, while to some degree limited in his self-defence by the consideration due to his host, he did not decline. The motive of the invitation cannot be inferred from the narrative. But whether prompted by sinister intentions, by mere curiosity, or even possibly by a tolerant hospitality, the chief Pharisee's dinner soon led to a strained situation.

A man with the dropsy had either intruded into the semi-publicity of the banquet-room, as on other occasions, or had been purposely brought there by the Pharisees to raise the vexed sabbath question. With suspicious reticence the guests declined to enter into a discussion opened by Jesus as to the legality of sabbath-day healing. They had now reached the point where they were content to accumulate evidence against him without the risk of being worsted in the argument by his keen repartee. He healed the sick man, and the incident was closed.

Seating at table, aside from special guests, followed the order of precedence. Observing the evident eagerness for places near the head of the table, Jesus made it the theme of a brief homily on social rivalry. It is to be observed that he addressed his hearers on their own level, the level of policy. One is not to take the chief seat unbidden, because one thus exposes himself to the chance of humiliation in case of the arrival of a social superior. The politic thing, on the contrary, is to take the lowest place, even though it be obviously beneath one's acknowledged rank; since "he that is down need fear no fall," and the inevitable promotion, when it comes, will emphasize not only the true rank, but the modesty of the guest.

This was reasoning that would appeal to the dullest understanding. Jesus was aware that the only way to teach some people good manners is to show them the basis of expediency and indirect selfishness which underlies any conventional code. But he was not content to leave the matter there. A deep, abiding principle of life underlies the distinction between real and assumed humility. The true humility brings true exaltation, and thereby in the long run it may be distinguished from the spurious article—a saying later repeated by Jesus in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:14), and echoed elsewhere. This lifts the rule of etiquette to the ethical plane.

Again, the swift glance around the room, which had revealed in all its pettiness the scramble for precedence, takes in also the evident selfishness in the selection of guests. This man was asked because he had money, that man for his political influence, this other to repay a social debt. Nowhere a guest to whom the generous meal and the good cheer would be a

rare and long-remembered pleasure; no poor relations, no obscure students, no timid and unsuccessful neighbors falling behind in the struggle with misfortune and needing a helping hand and a square meal to brace them up—no such guests in this house. Every man that eats at this table is expected to pay for his entertainment sooner or later, not in coin, but in coveted invitations, or political co-operation, or other service.

All wrong, says Jesus. This is not hospitality at all; it is business—mere trading of so much bread and meat and wine for expected benefits of a higher market value. We are not, of course, to understand from the phrase, "Call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen," that he condemns the hospitality among friends and kindred for mutual enjoyment. His own example sanctioned this delightful part of home life. But this must not be the only kind of entertaining. In it we always run the risk (observe the mild irony: "lest haply") of getting something back for what we give. The only way to be sure of avoiding this discount on our generosity is to invite those who cannot possibly repay in kind. Then the inevitable reward, impossible in this life, will be certain in the life to come. The implied premise is that no man really gets paid twice for anything. If full value is received here, it cannot be expected there.

II. OUTLINE FOR SERMON (LUKE 14:7-14): CHRISTIAN ETIQUETTE

1. The Christian in social relations is not to abandon or defy social forms. Though arising from a noble impatience with petty and undiscriminating rules, such a course arouses antagonism, limits usefulness, and leads to a mistaken individualism.

2. The Christian, while accepting the letter of the social code wherever possible, is to elevate its spirit and broaden its application in the light of the laws of the kingdom.

3. The Christian in society will not insist on having his importance recognized. Good taste and the Christian law of respect, "preferring one another," unite in requiring that we recognize to the full the worth and dignity of others, preferring ourselves to take a lower place than our worth entitles us to rather than by any means to show to others less honor than belongs to them.

4. Christian hospitality will not be confined to entertainment for mutual pleasure, and will avoid entirely the abuse of the privilege for selfish advantage. It will emphasize the uncalculating spirit which gives pleasure without expecting a return.

5. The higher law of compensation operates here as everywhere in the kingdom of heaven. Love brings its own rewards.

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